

WANTED – New EU Housing Strategy!

We, young, progressive locally and regionally elected politicians, can see that the lack of affordable and social housing is fuelling a **housing crisis all over Europe**, a crisis that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and energy scarcity at a time when climate change is accelerating. We emphasise that housing is a basic human need and **a fundamental right** that must be safeguarded for everybody.

We believe that the EU needs to take decisive action to make the enforceable right to housing for all a reality. We stress that, in partnership with affordable and social housing providers and responsible private landlords, local and regional authorities are indispensable actors in implementing and adapting European and national policies to the realities on the ground. There is no "one-size-fits-all" answer for housing in Europe: **subsidiarity is paramount** to achieving a transition towards affordable, sustainable and social housing in a post-carbon society.

More than 80 million people are currently affected by the **lack of affordable and social housing** in Europe. 17.1% of the EU population live in overcrowded houses and 10.3% spend more than 40% of their revenues on their rent. The **investment gap** in housing is estimated at a minimum of EUR 57 billion per year. Furthermore, 47% of **young Europeans** between the ages of 18 and 34 are still forced to live at home with their parents. Thousands of students and young people are on the waiting lists of social housing providers. Housing is responsible for 40% of the EU's energy consumption and **36% of Europe's greenhouse emissions**. There are at least **700 000 homeless people** sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation on any given night in the EU. Moreover, the overall proportion of public and **social housing** has been decreasing for years. Financialisation, the sale of affordable and social housing to international private investors and the concentration on several big international players are contributing to a greater scarcity of affordable housing and to skyrocketing rents. Housing must therefore become a top priority for the EU, and all its **policies must contribute towards decent, energy-efficient, social and affordable housing for all**. The commitments in the European Pillar of Social Rights must not remain empty words.

The European Social Democrats have to propose and implement fundamental changes to reverse these trends.

As young, progressive locally and regionally elected politicians, we call for the implementation of the following 15 proposals at EU level:

1. increase public investment by including in the European Semester and the National Reform Programmes a quantitative national public investment target for social and affordable housing in all EU Member States and financial sanctions if this goal is not reached;
2. improve the flexibility of the use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) in housing, particularly by giving more time for the elaboration of projects because the required four years to spend the money allocated under the RFF are not sufficient;

3. incentivise Member States and regions to prioritise tackling housing insecurity, supporting young people in accessing housing, developing student housing and investing in new social and affordable housing when allocating the European Structural and Investment Funds (including the Just Transition Fund) and drawing up the national recovery plans;
4. develop innovation in housing, particularly in social housing, at European level. The exchange of good practices is crucial in addressing the gender dimension and the greening of housing, in collecting data, and in developing innovative ways of managing housing such as through the development of co-ownership in order to build community wealth;
5. recognise social and affordable housing for all and not only for disadvantaged citizens as a service of general economic interest (SGEI) to protect it from speculative competition and remove at the same time the narrow SGEI target group definition for accessing social housing; enshrine by the same token housing policy in a larger European social policy by developing at Member State level a "housing affordability check", in particular to allow addressing homelessness in the long run;
6. facilitate access to finance by including social and affordable housing in the new EU social taxonomy and by providing information about the private investments available for the sector;
7. implement Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights by enforcing the right of all EU citizens to access social and affordable housing or good-quality housing assistance; define what constitutes emergency housing, to minimise, inter alia, the risk of perpetuating the recourse to such housing formulas for refugees or homeless people;
8. reinforce the European Platform Combatting Homelessness as a new tool to act effectively on the ground, to help local and regional authorities acknowledge the extent and the nature of homelessness in their territory, to foster mutual learning and to collect relevant data in the housing field at regional level;
9. set up an EU framework to regulate the impact of digital platforms on housing markets;
10. establish, with European cities and regions, a common framework for local rental price control and rent stabilisation systems. The European Union should incentivise Member States and local and regional authorities to put caps on rents and to link rents to the energy performance of buildings;
11. tackle speculation and money laundering in the housing market at EU level through an EU-wide real estate transparency registry, including the beneficial owner of the respective property, thus ensuring that every tenant knows the owner's identity; regulate the housing market in order to avoid predatory trends set by large real estate companies and to prevent that empty buildings are not used;
12. phase out fossil-fuel-powered heating systems in housing by 2050 and foresee financial support programmes for the most vulnerable Europeans to achieve this goal, in combination with fixed performance obligations for the housing sector in order to reduce its emissions;

13. use the revenues of the EU emissions trading system (ETS) and the Social Climate Fund to finance grants to help the most vulnerable EU citizens renovate their homes – jointly managing this scheme with the regions – and establish a comprehensive policy on energy poverty to ensure that the Renovation Wave improves housing affordability across the EU;
 14. promote new aesthetic and comfort standards for housing in general and social housing in particular through the Bauhaus initiative or the European Responsible Housing Initiative, in order to make the densification of cities more acceptable and limit urban sprawl;
 15. promote social, affordable cooperative, intergenerational not-for-profit housing under projects co-financed by the EU to reinforce cohesion in Europe.
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